

Concerto allows violinist to display new maturity

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

Music director Neeme Jarvi was back last week with another imaginative program, much of it outside the standard repertoire.

The solo work was the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 1 by Shostakovich, performed by Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg. The program opened with a world premiere performance of "Sinfonia Antiqua" by the American composer Lawrence Rapchak (b. 1951). The standard repertoire was represented by the Symphony No. 3 ("Organ") by Saint-Saens.

Salerno-Sonnenberg has developed a lot since I saw her first time at Meadow Brook about five years ago. In her early 20s, she is an established artist known to audiences through

her several television appearances in addition to heavy concert schedule.

The first Shostakovich violin concertos had to wait several years for its premiere in 1955, after remaining hidden during the Stalinist oppression. Its highly descriptive and emotional content makes it into a significant contribution to this century's violin repertoire.

IT RECEIVES far less exposure than the two violin concertos by Prokofiev. This performance made a compelling case for a more regular inclusion of this work in the repertoire.

Artistic maturity was reflected in Salerno-Sonnenberg's performance of this challenging and inspired work.

Unlike many women artists, who



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used to draw attention with outlandish colorful and glittering outfits, Salerno-Sonnenberg was the exception here with her casual outfit, including black pants.

While the importance of the outfit may be part of the concert hall reality for many artists, Salerno-Sonnenberg proved capable of drawing attention of the capacity audience with her art.

The serene, opening movement, which features intense emotional

turmoil rather than a showy technique, sounded sincere in this mature approach, with only occasional sagging in its expressive intensity. So was the long cadenza leading to the spirited, fiery final movement, in which she displayed a daring approach with virtuosic technique.

POSSIBLY ONE of the drawbacks in the design of Orchestra Hall was the absence of a built-in pipe organ.

If such design would have left the general acoustics unaffected, then

the sound of such an organ would have been far more fulfilling than that of its electronic counterpart, used in this performance of Saint-Saens' "Organ" symphony.

This rendition by the celebrated and capable organist Marilyn Mason proved to be the next best thing, however. The thundering organ chords in the final movement had to be somewhat augmented by a listener's imagination.

But the less voluminous passages were well-shaped and crafted, and tended to integrate with the orchestra without the common sense of incongruity that such a combination invariably evokes.

American music outside the standard repertoire was one of the things that Jarvi promised us when assuming his position as music director. The Sinfonia Antiqua by Rapchak in

line with fulfilling that pledge.

BEHIND THIS work there is evidently the attempt to sound agreeable and accessible, judging by its non-dissonant nature. While impressions of first listening are limited in value, the sound sounded to me a collection of sounds leading nowhere.

This seems to be a necessary aspect of experimentation in the line of duty, and in view of the work's brief duration, it is not an unreasonable imposition on the listener.

Another item of American music was performed as an encore — a movement from the Symphony No. 4 by Charles Ives. Orchestral encores are a steady tradition under Jarvi, and most of the selections, which are unannounced, tend to put the knowledge of the critics to the test. I might as well confess I cheated.

Program relied too much on Vivaldi's works

Anatoli Cheinokh is one of the most ambitious and energetic chamber music entrepreneurs in our area. His group, Ars Poetica, has attracted some of the finest musicians from prominent orchestras such as the Cleveland, Chicago and Detroit symphonies, together with capable artists from smaller orchestras such as the Windsor and Ohio Chamber Orchestras.

Following a prominent career as a violinist in his native Soviet Union and in this country, Cheinokh has replaced the bow with the baton for this series. Earlier this month, Ars Poetica presented a special fundraising event at the Cranbrook House. Cheinokh contributed his fee from this event to the State of Israel. While this may not seem much in terms of dollars and cents, one



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should not underestimate the power of art in motivating individuals in a civilized society (and I hope that Goy Engler is reading and listening).

Few events were presented by this group since its inception two years ago — but the level and capability proved to be impressive. This was the case this time, in terms of sound, balance and coordination I had some significant reservations about

the musical content, however. The program was extremely lopsided, consisting of four works by Vivaldi, and only one and a half works by other masters. The fractional work consisted of two movements from the Piano Trio by Ravel, performed by violinist Molly Fung, cellist Bryon Damm and pianist Sylvia Wang. I would have gladly exchanged the remainder of this masterpiece, which was performed in our area recently

by the Beaux Arts Trio, for two or even three of the Vivaldi concerti.

THIS CRITICISM, however, does not extend to the performing artists, who did a convincing job in maintaining as much variety and vitality as possible with these selections. Among them was Donald Baker, principal oboist with the Detroit Symphony, who performed a Concerto in D Minor for Oboe and Strings. His role was so demanding that, at times, it hardly gives the performer an opportunity to catch his breath. Baker's smooth performance seemed to suggest that, in his case at least, music making may be a plausible alternative to breathing.

Another landmark was achieved with the Concerto Grosso Op. 2, No. 8, with violinists Lev Polyakin and Takaki Masame performing the chal-

lenging solo parts capably. These two Vivaldi works should have sufficed for one program.

The early divertimento K. 136 in D Major by Mozart, is a popular short selection in the chamber music repertoire. Seldom is this work heard with such vitality and artistic resourcefulness and variety.

Musical variety which was in short supply in the program, was abundantly present in the three encores, consisting of a slow, sad minuet by Schubert, a movement from an early String Sonata by Ho-

son and the Pizzicato Polka by Johann Strauss. The latter was especially captivating and humorous by Cheinokh, whose ambitious conducting tends to go far beyond the scope of the small chamber selections. On several occasions, his baton hit the low overhead chandelier, evoking laughter from the audience.

The professional capability of the group could, in due course, place it among the top groups of its kind. A better balance and variety in program selections would go a long way toward that end.

Home gardeners invited to seminar

Home gardeners and landscape professionals are invited to take part in an all-day garden symposium Saturday, March 2, on the campus of Oakland University. The symposium is sponsored by Bordine's Better Blooms and English Gardens.

Speakers are Ken and Mike Miller, horticultural plant experts and garden designers. Mike Miller served many years as curator of the woodland garden at the acclaimed Missouri Botanical Garden. He is principal designer at Horticultural Consultants.

Ken Miller is an accomplished designer, photographer and horticultural consultant. He teaches part-time at Missouri Botanical Garden and is co-host of a call-in gardening program on KMOX radio in St. Louis.

Slide presentations feature in-depth information on plants and design. Plant topics include hostas, iris, peonies, day lilies and use of annuals. Three segments deal with aspects of design including design elements, color and designing with perennials to add distinction to foundation plantings. "How-to" topics include composting and propagation. A detailed handout package summarizes the day's events and serves as excellent reference material.

To request a complete brochure or more information, call Ken Miller Horticultural Consultants at 1-800-347-6565.

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Eskimo artist exhibits at U-M

From March 20 through March 23, 1991, Canada's premier Inuit (Eskimo) artist, Paulo Pudlat, will be in residence at the University of Michigan Museum of Art.

His visit coincides with the Museum of Art's March 23 opening of "Paulo: Thirty Years of Drawing," a retrospective exhibiting the artist's career during the past three decades and featuring more than 100 of his works. The Museum of Art is the only venue in the United States for this exhibition organized by the National Gallery of Canada.

"Paulo: Thirty Years of Drawing" will remain on view at the Museum of Art through May 19.

The following two events are free and open to the public:

• Thursday, March 21, 5:30 p.m. Slide show, talk and public reception at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, March 21 at the Ann Arbor Art Association.

• Public opening reception for the artist 4-7 p.m. Saturday, March 23 at the U-M Museum of Art, with refreshments and a 5 p.m. Gallery conversation featuring Marie Routledge of the National Gallery of Canada, Marjorie Maitre-Jackson of the

U-M School of Art, Paulo Pudlat and Jimmy Manning, following by a catalogue-signing session.

Pudlat was born in 1916 in an igloo some 200 miles east of Cape Dorset, North West Territories, and grew up in the traditional Inuit way, hunting and fishing for his livelihood along the shores of the Hudson Bay. In 1950, when an injury interrupted his life as a hunter, Pudlat began drawing for the first time. Since then he has produced more than 4,500 drawings, and now, at age 75, he is one of Canada's leading contemporary artists, with nearly 100 solo and group exhibitions to his credit.

He explores not only traditional Inuit mythology and motifs but modern technology and change as well, and in particular the effect these have had on Inuit civilization.

Accompanying Pudlat will be his friend, translator, and fellow artist Jimmy Manning. During their three-day stay in Ann Arbor, Pudlat and Manning will visit a select number of university and community arts organizations and will take part in a series of special events at the Museum of Art.

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